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Congress of the United States
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March 19, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to provide all levels of our education system with the flexibility needed to respond to this unprecedented time of uncertainty amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As you know, this has led to school closures across Michigan. I write to request that you continue to provide guidance and flexibility for states and local education agencies as they implement online learning, especially as it pertains to ensuring students with disabilities have access to a free and equal education (FAPE).

Our number one priority must be to support the health and nutrition of our students and I commend the Department for allowing students to access meal service during school closures.

Michigan schools announced they would be closing for three weeks on March 16. Recent guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that longer closures of eight weeks or more may have a greater impact on community spread. Should schools remain closed for the remainder of the school year, I am concerned about students missing out on critical instruction.

Delivering online education is an urgent priority and must be thoughtfully implemented to ensure it is accessible to all students. It is critical that, to the greatest extent possible, all students with disabilities can be provided a robust special education, using related services identified in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP), or a plan developed under Section 504.

I encourage the Department to provide support to school districts in ensuring accommodations and accessible instructional material for students with disabilities, including ensuring documents and websites are compatible with assistive technologies, such as screen readers and closed captioning videos. Additionally, I encourage the Department to provide supports to school districts that consider the needs of students and families with disabilities who may be affected by other debilitating factors, students and families who may not have ready access to internet, streaming, libraries, and transportation just to name a few.

Thank you again for your commitment to our nation's students during this time of crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Haley M. Stevens" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress